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LESLEY-JANE O'ROURKE.

THE BODMIN MOOR PROJECT
LESKERNICK HILL.

24 MAY 1997.

Departure.

For once in my life I am actually on time. Everything is packed (thanks to Karl) and I am ready to go. I say goodbye to Karl, Ski the dog and the cats. Mum drives me to Falcon Wood station to catch the train into London. My coach ticket was bought yesterday, so there shouldn't be that long to wait. My first stop is the Institute to drop in my essay and library books. Bump in to Helen Whilst there - she is travelling down by train.

I am missing my car already!!

I hate coaches and to top it all we are stuck in a never ending stream of holiday traffic.

Everybody has picked this weekend to go to Cornwall!

I am supposed to be at the campsite at six o'clock to night. Fat chance of that! At the moment, we are still in Somerset. It is almost four o'clock. I've phoned the campsite to tell them that there is no way I can be there by six. I tell them that I will get a taxi but I am informed that that will be very costly and not to worry somebody will be there to meet me.

Fag Break at Plymouth!!

It seems ironic that most of the people on this coach including the driver are smokers. The coach however, is non-smoking. Anyway, not long now until we cross into Cornwall. I am beginning to wish that I had come down by train the same as Helen. Better still would have been my car.

6pm Arrive in Cornwall and it feels great to be back. It's funny, because although I have no Cornish blood in me, I have always felt more at home here than anywhere else. I have always thought that there is no place like it. There are so many contrasts to this county, from bleak and desolate moors, to treacherous cliffs and lush valleys. Absolutely excellent!!

7pm I have made it to Bodmin. I am all alone. There is absolutely no one here. Except me.

I phoned Karl to let him know that I made it OK I am missing him and the animals already. Phoned my mum as

well. She says that she will come pick me and Stuart up when we leave.

7.30pm Still all, all alone.

7.45pm The campsite switch-board is off for the night.

7.50pm I am starting to get a little worried. I make the discission to walk the three miles to Bodmin Park Way station. It is uphill and dangerous but it was written on the sheet as one of the pick up points. So, with any luck there will be someone there.

9.15pm Arrive at the station. I am close to tears. Why does everything I do seem to go so wrong? No one is here. My backpack ways a ton and I've been water - bombed by some tourists in a clapped - out mark III escort. I've been driven at by various VW drivers - apparently there is a rally in Newquay tonight. Thank God it isn't raining or some rotten sod would have driven through puddles at me!!! Then again it is very hot, so maybe that isn't such a bad idea. It will be dark soon and this place is just a wee bit on the spooky side. I don't relish spending the night here. I want to go home.

9.30pm My saviour in a shinning white cavalier awaits! I have found a sleeping taxi driver. A true old Cornishman who could talk for England and who is excellent company. I finally arrive at the campsite at 10 O'Clock. John the owner takes pity on me and directs me to the caravan that is to be my home for the next ten days along with Gary, Stuart and Kerry. I pass an Eastbourne hire van and guess it must be Sue's. There is an open caravan and I see Sue sitting in the doorway with a crowd of people who I had either not yet met or whom I hardly know.

I'VE ARRIVED!!!

I feel completely shattered. Barbara gives me a plate and piles on the pasta. To this I have no objection. I could eat at least two horses with a side order of rhino with elephant for pudding. Everybody is really friendly. Sue didn't get my telephone message until it was too late, but she states that she thought that I was 'streetwise' enough to look after myself. She has more faith in me than I have! There is lots to eat and drink. I don't have any bananas as Mike ST. has mine. Apparently I have four. Stuart is somewhere on the campsite. Kerry and Gary haven't arrived yet. I phone Karl to tell him that I made it and the fact that I managed to walk a marathon as unfit as I am, well it seemed like a marathon to me.

I'm glad I didn't go home.

Sunday 25th May 1997

God, it was cold last night!

I am awake at 7 a.m. which really surprises me. Even more surprising is the fact that my muscles aren't screaming at me yet, but they will!

I now remember why I am awake. A boy was screaming his head off whilst his father was yelling like crazy.

My muscles are now screaming at me.

Stuart and I travel to the site with Mike W. and Tony. Knowing Sue's love for things miles above sea level this is going to be uphill all the way! I wonder if there is much archaeological work in Holland. We follow Barbara and the route takes us through Altarnun. I mention that I know a great pub here. In fact I tell them that I know quite a few 'great' pubs in this area. I have a feeling that the guys think that I am an alcoholic. My limit is Coke, honest!

We reach the drop off point around 9.45 a.m. and load up the four - wheel drive. Most of us walk over to the site with Chris Tilley and Barbara. Land marks and features are pointed out to us along the way. Chris, Barbara and Helen give really great talks as we continue walking. I am loving every minute of it already. We are heading towards the slope of Leskernick Hill. What appears to be a huge mass of rocks is in fact, the remains of the Bronze Age settlement which is our destination. There are so many 'huts' and boundaries. It is so impressive. I wish that I was here for the duration instead of ten days. I already know that I would like to come back next year and that is before we start.

We are given a guided tour around the excavation area so that we can start to get a feel for the site. I have so many questions to ask but I feel way out of my depth, so I just listen asking the odd one here and there. I also begin to get a bit snap happy with my camera. I knew that would be fatal. I also take a few shots of everybody either giving or listening to the talks.

At lunch time Stuart and I are volunteered (by Sue) to be tea boy and girl. This could be a disaster as my tea making skills are pretty naff. Still, no one has complained yet. We are in hut 28 and the view from here is fantastic. This is CT's favourite hut. The whole site has a really nice atmosphere but there does seem to be something special - calming about H 28. Is it possible that it was used for some religious purpose? Who knows?

We are surrounded by some really impressive 'hills'. In front of me can be seen the Beacon; to my left is the eerie presence of Brown Willy and just behind that is Roughtor which is my favourite; and behind us is Bray Down. All, like Leskernick are crowned with Cairns. I keep wondering why this is so. I have been trying to get into the minds of the Bronze Age community that occupied the site. What were there reasons for choosing this site? How did they cope in the harshness of Winter or was it just a summer camp? Why did they leave and did they find it as awesome as I do? I could sit here mulling this over all day. Still no one has complained about the tea.

I am working with Old Chris and Chris Greatorrex in Hut 39. They are both great fun except they are taking the mickey out of me for being an Arsenal supporter. Mind you Chris G. supports Nottingham Forest. Someone had to! I have to work at my shovel technique. Old Chris is working really hard. I feel guilty but I am A whizz with the trowel. Sue has just been over with a really worried expression on her face. This apparently is the norm.

We pack up at 5pm. I could stay here all day. We have to hide the tools. Sue looks anxious. MST looks like he needs a pint. The walk back is really hard. My asthma pump is back home and I have a sun burnt nose, but even so, it has been a great first day for me anyway.

I make the necessary phone calls home. I'm missing Karl and the pets. Write out the postcards that I promised to send. Most of us head for the campsite bar. Stuart and I stake a claim to the pool table. I beat Stu but we get beaten by MW and Tony in a game of doubles. Sue tells us we have an 8.15 am start. There is a look of horror on everyone's faces. I swear there is a wicked gleam in her eyes.

Stuart and I are still awake at 1.30 am we will pay for it in the morning.

Monday 26th May 1997

It looks like it is going to be another scorcher up on the moor to day.

Today will be my first full day excavating. I stay working with CG and O'C. There is a nice working atmosphere in our group and if I don't know or am not sure about anything, I don't feel an idiot when I have to ask.

My task is to clean all the grass and loose dirt from the top section of the hut which was de - turfed yesterday. I

feel like I am going the pace of a snail but I think it is going all right. CG says that I am doing fine, I just wish that I had his confidence. The bottom right section of the hut has been marked out and CG and O'C begin de-turfing it. As for me, well I stay all on my own.

I am becoming a contortionist. My legs and bum are getting into positions that I didn't think they were capable of. It could be a little bit embarrassing if I get stuck between the rocks.

Our way home is blocked by a very large cow that is more interested in stuffing its face than moving. MW gets out of the car to try and move it by chucking stones and sticks at its feet. Typical towny! Me to the rescue.

Stuart and I have new room mates. When we get back Ceri is waiting in the van. She is a fellow first year student. We all know each other so thats a relief. We sort out the sleeping arrangements. I loose the double bed and get demoted to the single bed next to Ceri. Its really tiny. Somehow, I don't think that it was meant for some one of my size. We are just waiting for Gary to arrive. Helen says that he is really nice. He is in my age group so I won't feel like mum anymore in the van.

Helen was right about Gary. We eat and then head for the bar. There is a guy singing to night. Gary says that he is brilliant.
Gary lied!

Stuart does a disappearing act. Most of the project are grouped around one table. Some of us are taking the mickey out of the singer. Sue and I were talking when MST left with CG yelling at him to f**k off! I am shocked. I didn't think that CG would be one to loose his temper. Gary says "Oh yes Chris can!" Its always the quiet ones!

Gary, Justin and I reckon that CG could pass as a Spice Girls fan. CG is not amused and I nearly end up wearing his pint. Turns out that he is a very passionate Blues fan. OOPs! Walk back with CG and O'C and have a chat about this and that. I am last back in the van. Everybody is still up. Why do I feel like I have just broken a curfew?

Tuesday 27th May 1997.

Tony has gone home today. He only came down to meet everyone which seems a bit pointless, as most of us would have gone home by the time he gets back. Stuart and I

drive in with Cg and Justin. We are subjected to the 'Blues' for the duration. Actually, it is extremely good.

I am last up the hill as usual.

Spend most of the day clearing up section one. CG has come to check what I have done.

Chris steps on my glasses.

Chris bends my glasses and tries to straighten them out.

Chris has no broken my glasses and run!

Unfortunately thumping your supervisor does not look good on my progress sheet.

This is going to cost him a couple of drinks at least.

Glad to get back today. I have chronic toothache and more dust in my eyes than is in H39. I drop my coach ticket into Sue so that someone else can use it to get back to London if they need it. She asks how I am getting on. I tell her that I am really like it and that I wish that I was staying for longer than ten days. I also mention that I would like to come back next year. We talk about the location of Leskernick and I mention that I have been thinking about its significance for a while now. I ask whether it was just a summer residence or was it occupied all year round. If it was, then it must have been really awful during winter. Sue points out that the granite walls would probably have been sufficient enough for there needs. It is also possible that the huts would have been packed with turf for further insulation. This I can see.

There seems to be a bit of an atmosphere in the caravan tonight. I feel really out of place. Ceri seems to be ridiculing my organisation and Stu just isn't talking to anyone. May be it is just me. I forget that I am listening to my walkman and everyone is laughing at my singing. I didn't think it was that bad.

Gary and I go up to the bar and CG and I have a pool Competition. I loose dismally 3-0. I am never going to live this down. This calls for a re-match. Gary is still up when I get back to the van. We talk about the site and his work on his dissertation which he is doing for his third year. He is using a site over at Zennor. Its really good. Have to visit. Italk about my interests in prehistory and that this is the area I want to specialise in. He gives me a list of authors to read. We talk about some of the lectures at the institute and I now know who I can go to for help.

Wednesday 28th May 1997

Swap backpacks with Helen this morning. Feel really guilty - she shouldn't have to.

It is really windy up here today. The sun is out but it is freezing. My coat is back at the caravan - excellent place for it to be.

Sue, CG and me are finishing off section 2 so that Justin can plan it. Helen, O'C and G have started to clear the earth from the back of section 1. We can really see things taking shape now. Things are moving really quickly. I try and keep low to stop the wind going straight through my jumper. It doesn't seem to be working and I have wind creeping into parts that I didn't know I had. I don't feel really with it today. Mind you though, Sue did a really interesting thing with mikes banana peel at lunch. I just hope that he got it all out from his jumper.

Stuart seems happier tonight. Ceri, Stu and I walk up to the bar. I drop a letter into sue for Louise Martin. We have a really good chat and I mention that I would like to do my third year thesis on a site down here. Sue is very helpful and it looks possible that I could be back next year. Fingers crossed. We also discuss careers for women in archaeology and the fact that there are too few. I hope to get my PHD.

Look for Gary and Helen. Knock on the caravan. Wrong caravan. However it is occupied by an extremely gorgeous guy. Pity his girlfriend was sitting behind him. Reach the bar but everyone else has gone. Have a drink anyway - it is gone closing time. I was at Sue's for over an hour. I never realised.

Thursday 29th May 1997

Sue Hamilton goes back to London.

Work up feeling like death. O'C tells me not to go but go anyway.

The climb up this morning was really awful.

Don't feel like talking to anyone. CG leaves me in a section all by myself and suprisingly I manage to last the day on site. There is now noticeable changes in the soil. Dark oily patches, grey-beige patches and also a very strong orangey-red layer. It is this layer that we are digging down to today.

Gary and O'C are finding charcoal behind the hut where they are working. I find a very tiny quartz crystal point but it is nothing significant. Suggest giving it to MST as a find (joke). I like crystals. CG thinks I am made.

I feel tons better by 3pm. I only wish I had earlier.

Stop at the Rising Sun on the way back. Play pool with Stuart. He thinks that I am pretty good - for a girlie that is. However, CG still thinks I'm crap.

Mike W holds a meeting in his van to give us an insight as to the role of the Anthropologists on the dig and lays on a really good meal. I get embarrassed to eat spaghetti in front of people, so Mike gives me a knife. During the course of the meal, a kamikaze moth gets killed by Mike W before Helen valiantly tried to rescue it from his clutches. MST, not one to see good food go to waste, thinks nothing of eating the dead moth. Stuart is left with tears in his eyes while I try to swallow my mouthful of spaghetti. CG looks totally wacked - possible sun stroke?

G, H, MW, Ceri and myself make last orders at the bar. Helen and I talk about the site and how I'm getting on. She tells me that she has noticed how quickly I am picking things up like techniques and picking out the different contexts. This really is a boost to my confidence. Listening and watching does work!

We have a really excellent chat in our van when we get back. I think we are finally bonding as a group. Stay up talking with G and Ceri. Gary is very knowledgeable and my reading list is growing some what. He would make an excellent lecturer.

Friday 30th May 1997

Get held up on route this morning by a tractor pulling a JCB. The walk up is definitely getting easier. CG gives Ceri and me a section at the back of the hut to level and clean up. Take some photos of everyone working. MW wants copies. Manage to get a brilliant shot of Gary, Chris G, Justin and Old Chris moving a boulder from the interior of the hut, just as Gary falls over Justin. Classic!!!

CG takes Ceri and me through the context sheets and stratigraphy. I learn more in an hour from him, than I did from a whole day at Boxgrove. He also tells us what to put in our field notebooks. This trip has been an excellent learning curve. I have gained so much just from talking to SH, G and CG. I am really gutted that I only have three days left on site. It is going too quickly.

Started excavating the interior of H39 today. Still no finds or features.

By the end of the shift, the wind has really intensified. It is impossible to clean the surface. Go with Mike W to take the tea gear back down to H28. He comments that he thought CG had done a really good job teaching us about contexts etc. I said that this was so. CG walks over and asks if we are talking about him. We relay everything that has been said and then notice that MW is writing it all down in his diary.

Pass a cow giving birth on the way home but CG refuses to stop so I can watch. Something about me being disgusting. Stop at the Rising Sun instead. It is definitely becoming our local. More pool playing with Stuart. I win. Stu is not a happy chappy! Stuart decides to go home to St. Agnes tonight as it is our day off tomorrow. We all see him off from the club bar. SH arrives back from London.

CG has agreed to go as a reference for me on my CV. More van talk when we get back from the bar. We are all missing Stu.

Saturday 31st May 1997

Day Off!!!!

Come too at 6am. Typical! Take the rubbish out after I dropped it over the caravan floor. I even polish my boots! Ouch! I must be coming down with something as this is not normal behaviour. Well, not normal for me anyway. Go with CG to take Justin to the Station. It is his birthday so he is going home for the week. Stu and I will be gone when he gets back. Really like Justin, he never has nothing bad to say about anyone.

Arrive back and do the washing. Ceri is going out with her uncle, Gary is going into Camelford and Stu still isn't back yet.

Go with SH, MST, O'C and CG to our 'local'. At the pub conversation is going in all directions. The moth/MST incident from Thursday crops up and SH states that she maybe morally deprived but MST is the pits!! I am then asked to make a note in my diary and tell them that the moth incident is all ready in it.

Head for Roughtor and no one says no when MST buys a round of Cornish ice-cream.

I absolutely adore Roughtor. Much more so than neighbouring Brown Willy. Roughtor just seems to have such a magical air surrounding it. Even so I cannot

believe that our day off is going to be spent up a hill! I travel off on my own taking the rockiest route. I take a rest just below the summit on a huge flat bed shaped rock, marvelling at the scenery but feeling sickened by the scares left by the quarrying. I can here Sue's voice drifting down from above. Reach the summit and go with O'C, MST and CG to try and make the rocking rock move. I am surprised that they aren't blown off the top. You can see right across to Tintagel from here. At least I think it is Tintagel. The wind is really getting strong now, so we make our way back down. Back at the car I make friends with a huge dog that decides that behind CG's car would make a nice resting spot. Had a really excellent time.

Arrive back to get ready for the England V Poland match. Our van has been designated football van. Just one snag there though, G and Ceri don't like football and Stu still isn't back yet.

CG, O'C and MW arrive to watch the footie. Gary stays and helps to cook the pizza. The match was awful especially the commentary. England won 2-0.

Sunday 1st June 1997

Stuart didn't come back last night.

It is extremely windy up on site this morning which is making the work really hard to accomplish. I have grit in my eyes and it is really annoying. O'C doesn't seem himself this morning. Stu still hasn't arrived and this is not going down well with everyone.

SH thinks the best course of action is to give everyone a site tour to show the progress on the three digging areas. The cairn and Hut 23 look so different now.

In the afternoon I go over to MST at H23. I have a soft spot for H39 as it is where I began my first ever excavation work. But I really did enjoy the change. MST works a lot differently to CG. I have to admit to being nervous at first. MST seemed OK with what I was doing. I really like the layout of H23. And it is great to be out of the wind.

Arrive back at the campsite. No Stu. Jane has arrived to carry on planning where Justin left off. She is really nice. Stuart arrives back with his tail between his legs. I go through the Spanish inquisition with MW with regards to my answers for his questionnaire. I am the first of

the bunch to undergo cross-examination. We get side tracked quite alot and end up on topics not really that relevant to the interview. I have the impression that he thinks that I am really weird and that I am into some really weird stuff. That, however is the general consensus of people who know me. Good eh?

Off to the bar we go!!!

I beat MW on the pool table. Also manage to Beat Chris G but he says that it doesn't count. He then thrashes the life out of me on the next frames.

Monday 2nd June 1997

Very overcast this morning. I have an eerie feeling that the heavens could let rip and gives us a thorough soaking. Mind you just a tad would help to dampen down all the dust. Then again, a down pour is likely to turn the excavation areas into mud baths.

Begin work today with MST in H23. Sue tells me that MST said that I am doing a really good job. That really helps to build my confidence. I like working with MST anyway. By tea break the weather is looking extremely dodgy and the rain has started to fall.

I get poached by CG back to H39 to clean up a section he has put across the 'drain' feature. Before long, the heavens really open up and CG shuts down H39.

Although some of us are willing to stay, there is precious little we can do. Rained off at 2pm. Everyone is soaked. It is really frustrating as tomorrow is stu's and my last day! They say these things are sent to try us.

I spend the afternoon at the campsite feeling a little lost. It does now mean that we have seen Leskernick in a variety of different weather settings. Each one tends to add a different feel to the area, giving it various dramatic effects. I still cannot help wondering how the people who built this settlement actually felt about the place. In the short time that I have been here, I have really come to respect it. Did they respect and fear it? I still think that if they lived here in winter conditions, life would have been pretty unbearable to say the least.

Everyone goes to the local in the evening. On route we spot an army exercise and watch a very low flying plane unload soldiers on to stretch of moor next to us. I'm impressed.

Tuesday 3rd June 1997

LAST DAY

The rain has stopped but it is still very doubtful whether it will stay like this today.

I don't think it will but the rest aren't so sure. Go with CG, Stu and Jane to the site. Everyone else waits back at the camp. We arrive at the car park and it starts to rain as we are unloading. Everyone dives back into the car which is a little tricky as it is only a two door. We get a little braver and head up to the site. H23 is OK and workable. So is Helen's cairn. However, H39 has now become the Leskernick Hill swimming complex. I carry on cleaning the section across the drain feature. Jane gets on with the planning while Stu and Chris trowel back to the iron pan in the interior of the hut. It feels weird being the only ones up here. Even though the three excavation areas are located at different points on the hill and are isolated from each other, you are still aware that the others are up there working somewhere. But here we were just the four of us.

I help Chris and Jane with the levelling and manage to read Jane's plans quite well. - Meaning I manage to write the levels on the corresponding rocks on Jane's plan. Jane will be teaching us planning at Bignor next week, so I have the advantage. Chris then explains the levelling for me and draws me a diagram. I understand the levelling and keep the diagrams for my field notebook.

I spot Helen striding out in front across the moor. The others arrive just before break. The army are also invading. Loads of choppers keep flying over head. I will miss the flight shows from the jets and the hues.

I find a new born lamb on the way to the 'little girls rock'. It can't be more than two or three hours old. A new life beginning on the open moorland.

CG gives me the afternoon free to do my field notebook. O'C checks up on my diagrams, which I think are really naff. Unfortunately for Stu and me, the day is over really quickly. I don't want to leave. I walk down really slowly and take one last look at Leskernick Hill. Listen to the Blues in CG's car for the last time. Stu and I both agree to get a couple of tapes.

Mum and Dad pick us up at 7pm. I leave Gary a couple of cigarettes as a goodbye pressie. Say goodbye to everyone on route from the campsite. See SH and MST and both say that we have done really well and that if we want to come back next year then we can. So our places are booked.

The past few days have gone so quickly but even so I have learnt so much. I never once felt like an outsider and I think everyone got used to my non-stop talking.